

MHR *Connections*

Published by the Manitoba Human Rights Commission

Volume 10 Number 10

October 2010

THE MANITOBA
HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION

LA COMMISSION DES
DROITS DE LA PERSONNE
DU MANITOBA

www.manitoba.ca/hrc

The Rights Connection
by Jerry Woods - Chairperson
...it gets better

On October 12, 2010 a Fort Worth City Council meeting became a "must see" event on YouTube. Councilor Joel Burns took a moment of personal privilege to deliver a compelling, heart rendering message.

He began speaking about Asher Brown, a thirteen year old Houston student who was called faggot and queer and harassed and bullied for years. One day Asher went home and took his own life. Councilor Burns then spoke of Billy Lucas, Justin Aaberg, Seth Walsh, Tyler Clementi and Raymond Chase. All of these students were bullied for being gay, or perceived to be gay. All died within the last few months by committing suicide.

Councilor Burns is gay and he has delivered a powerful message, almost painful in its clarity and honesty. Teen bullying, he says, has reached an epidemic level in the United States, especially among gay and lesbian youth. It must stop.

Councilor Burns also spoke of his own experiences of being bullied. One specific incident made him believe that there was something very wrong with him. He no longer believes that, and on October 12th he pleaded with young people to give themselves a chance to see how much better it will get.

"Attitudes will change," he said, "and life will get better and you can have a lifetime of happy memories. Just give yourself the time."

To date, this video has been viewed over two million times. It is not easy to watch. It may make you feel uncomfortable, but the message is too strong to be ignored. I encourage you to watch it and pass on Joel Burns' message.

In Manitoba, if bullying makes reference to sexual orientation or gender identity, it is a form of harassment under *The Human Rights Code*. To understand more about bullying and its prevention, there is information on the Safe Schools Manitoba website.

According to the Canadian Children's Rights Council on average 294 youths die from suicide each year. The Council also acknowledges that gay and lesbian teens may be at particularly high risk, depending on the community they live in and their own self esteem.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ax96cghOnY4

Cheyenne Chartrand and her daughter were among 300 concerned people who attended the awareness rally offering hope and support.

organization for the city's gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and two spirit community.

One student in the crowd said he was there to give hope to those who have been bullied and referred to the series of recent suicides of gay teenagers in the United States. "It doesn't have to be close to home, to hit home," he said.

In the United States, a number of suicides have been linked to teens taking their own lives after suffering homophobic bullying. These tragedies include university student Tyler Clementi, a talented violinist who said that his roommate had covertly filmed him and videotaped it. He died of an apparent suicide on September 22, 2010 and Seth Walsh, a thirteen year old California school student, who took his own life six days later, after reportedly enduring relentless bullying.



The rally featured many speakers, including Chad Smith, the Executive Director of the Rainbow Resource Centre, the Honourable Jim Rondeau, Minister responsible for Healthy Child Manitoba, Manitoba Liberal Leader Dr. Jon Gerrard and many youth who have experienced bullying.

Gloria Steinem's message to students, "We do what we see, not what we're told."

Renowned writer and feminist Gloria Steinem spoke with hope, humour and honesty to an audience of nearly 700 people at a presentation hosted by the Brandon University Students' Union and the Brandon University Women's Collective.



Ms Steinem says that it is a common belief that women can do the same things that men can do, but it is not so commonly believed that men can do the tasks that women traditionally do.

both women and men lose part of their humanity if we allow systems that label people.

"Men are deprived of the qualities that are wrongly called feminine, which are actually the qualities necessary to nurture and raise children – empathy, patience attention to detail... And (women) are deprived of the qualities that are associated with men, that have to do with being assertive, dealing with conflict."

When Pam Roberts, The Manitoba Human Rights Commission's Youth Conference Co-Coordinator asked her what message she would have for Manitoba's youth, who are interested in promoting social change, she said, "We do what we see, not what we're told..." She then quoted Mahatma Gandhi, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world."

Ms Steinem was introduced by Dr. Deborah Poff, Brandon University's first female President. The presentation took place on October 18, 2010, in Brandon, on the 81st Anniversary of National Person's Day, which marks the day that women were officially recognized as people in Canada.

Deadlines for awards approaching

Manitoba Human Rights Awards' NOMINATION DEADLINE is November 12, 2010.

This year's Commitment Award will recognize individuals or groups who have promoted human rights through the Arts (Including the written word, visual arts and the performing arts). The Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award will recognize a youth group or individual (under 25 years of age) who has promoted human rights and fundamental freedoms within Manitoba. Nomination forms: http://www.gov.mb.ca/hrc/pdf/nomination_2010.pdf



New trend revealed in 2009 Annual Report

"An important new trend in human rights complaints is the steady increase in those filed on the basis of mental disabilities," says Dianna Scarth, Executive Director of the Commission. "In the past three years, the average number of mental disability complaints has risen to between 25% and 28% of all disability complaints received during the year," she adds, noting that between 2000 and 2002 mental disability complaints comprised 16% of total disability complaints.

In response to this trend the Commission will add a new seminar to its package of educational programs. "As mental disabilities present unique challenges to employers and service providers, we are developing this new seminar to give practical advice," Ms Scarth says, adding that the Accommodation of Employees with Mental Disabilities will be available to the public early in 2011. All of the Commission's public seminars and workshops can be found on its website.

The Annual Report also speaks to complaints that are systemic in nature. According to Ms Scarth these require extra time and resources to investigate, research and resolve. Once resolved, however, they benefit a group of people who have been systemically discriminated against.

She says that the Commission is using proactive ways of addressing systemic discrimination. For example, the Commission is now part of a coalition group, which includes the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Treaty Relations Commission. This group is working together to raise awareness of Human and Treaty Rights in Manitoba.

In his annual report message, Chairperson Jerry Woods writes, "For many years we have valued our basic right to work, to obtain services and to find housing without outdated prejudices getting in the way."

The 2009 Annual Report is available on the Commission's website.



Manitoba Human Rights Commission Investigator Pam Roberts demonstrates the Manitoba Class Action website to many enthusiastic teachers at the Manitoba Social Studies Teachers' Association SAG (Special Area Groups) 2010 annual conference.

The reviews were positive with many teachers recognizing that the site is a great teaching tool. Manitoba Class Action will be officially launched next month. www.manitobaclassaction.com/